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Trends in HES Results Since June

1. Since the 15 June communique reaffirming the ceasefire settlement for South Vietnam, Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) reporting has shown virtually no change in the relative shares of the population controlled by the government and the Communists. As of the end of September * -- the most recent month for which data are available -- 83.4% of South Vietnam's total population of about 19.5 million persons lived in hamlets or urban areas rated "A" (secure) or "B" (relatively secure). This is almost identical with the 30 June figure of 82.8% AB. Moreover, in the period between June and September, there has been very little month-to-month fluctuation in the countrywide AB figure, although changes have occurred on the regional and provincial levels.

2. As of the end of September, GVN control in MR 1 was the lowest of any region in South Vietnam, with about 58% of its population (3.3 million) living in A or B - rated areas. Although the change in GVN control between September and June was the greatest of any

* All HES data are reported on an end-of-month basis.

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region, it amounted to less than two percentage points. Moreover, the number of V-rated hamlets (those totally under Communist control) also has remained almost constant. Taken together, these trends underline the general stability of the control situation as reported from MR 1.

3. Of the five provinces comprising MR 1, all except Quang Tri and Thua Thien showed changes in AB-rated population of less than five percentage points. In Quang Tri, the proportion of people living in AB areas reportedly increased from about 34% to nearly 47%, primarily as a result of the expansion in refugee settlements. Thua Thien, on the other hand, showed an overall decline of about seven percentage points between June and September. In that province, increased activity by the Viet Cong infrastructure, especially stepped-up terrorist activity, was chiefly responsible for the decline. In September, Communist preparations to acquire a portion of the autumn rice harvest resulted in a decline in GVN control in Quang Tri and an increase in enemy control in Quang Nam. Nonetheless, earlier GVN gains in these areas largely negate these declines, so that their overall position changed relatively little between June and September.

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4. A slight improvement occurred between June and September in MR 2, as GVN control rose from 34% to almost 86% of the population (3.5 million). On an individual basis, moreover, all provinces in MR 2 showed some improvement or no decline during the period, with the exception of Kontum in which there was continued fighting between GVN and Communist forces. The improvements reflected the continued general lull in military activity, the upgraded performance of Rural Development cadres, and the greater presence of territorial forces in the countryside. Despite these advancements, however, enemy infrastructure activities periodically caused a noticeable deterioration in government control during the June-September period. This occurred several times in Binh Dinh, where the Communists' political organization is one of the strongest in the country, and in Phu Yen and Phu Bon where, although less formidable, it is still quite effective.

5. MR 3 remains the most highly pacified area of South Vietnam, with more than 95% of its population (5.8 million persons) living in "secure" or "relatively secure" areas. There was no significant statistical

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change in the June through September period, indicating the relative durability of government gains. MR 3 has the lowest number of "V"-rated hamlets (that is, those under complete enemy control) of any region in South Vietnam (67). Although military activity has been low, at least an equal share of the favorable position of the GVN must be attributed to the seriously eroded state of the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI).

6. As in Regions 1 and 2, there were significant shifts in AB population in only a few of MR 3's provinces. Most pronounced was the improvement of 14 percentage points in Hau Nghia. Almost all of this change occurred during September and, according to HES reporting, was accounted for by a substantially reduced level of enemy military activity. Binh Duong showed the second-highest degree of improvement (five percentage points), which also was a direct result of a lower level of enemy activity. It should be noted, however, that enemy presence and influence in the latter province remain extensive.

7. As of the end of September, 5.9 million of MR 4's 7.1 million people (about 84%) lived in A or B areas -- virtually no change from the 30 June figure (slightly more than 83%). In most areas, the GVN

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consolidated its control, with little resistance -- either military or political -- by the Communists. Although the enemy's military forces overall in MR 4 are weaker than in MR 3, increased military activity accounted for the decline reported in several provinces, most notably Chuong Thien. This province registered the greatest decline in AB population (four percentage points), with the result that only 36% of its population was in this category at the end of September. In Vinh Binh, a new province chief was installed in September, and has been credited with a significant improvement in the AB score (up 12 points), largely through the reinstitution of Dong Khoi operations against the VCI.* With the prime exception of An Xuyen, in which military activity during September was one factor in causing a decline, most of the decreases which occurred between June and September resulted from higher levels of enemy political activity, particularly terrorism, while government successes in limiting the activities of the VCI accounted for most of the reported improvements.

8. The relative stability of AB population between June and September in all military regions is generally substantiated by other sources. In several instances,

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however, inaccurate reporting -- which has been the greatest historical limitation on the usefulness of HES -- is still present. This is true, for example, in Vinh Binh which, as discussed above, has shown substantial gains. Several State Department assessments paint a pessimistic picture of the present extent of GVN control in the province, as well as future prospects for actual expansion. Although an improvement in leadership is acknowledged in these reports, they suggest at the same time that enemy political activity in Vinh Binh is far more extensive than portrayed in HES reporting. In Dinh Tuong, the small change in AB population between June and September (less than one percentage point) is substantiated by field reports, but the overall level of government control indicated by HES (almost 90%) probably is overstated. Three districts of Binh Tuong -- Cai Lay, Sam Giang, and Cai Be -- not only have been under VC influence for a number of years, but a significant proportion of the province's population lives in these areas. Because of these problems, the trends and absolute levels of AB-rated population in given areas should be viewed with caution.

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